

DEAD GREAT BLUE HERON FOUND AT 11,000 FOOT UTAH ELEVATION

Gary L. Hickman¹

ABSTRACT.— A Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) was found dead at the west end of the Utah Uinta Mountains at approximately 11,000 feet. Rain, fog, and very low cloud ceilings reducing visibility to almost zero causing directly or indirectly the heron's death was postulated.

On 5 September 1965 I found a dead Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) at the west end of the Utah Uinta Mountains on Utah Highway 150 just under the north side of the 11,000 foot Hayden Pass. The heron was found just after sunrise when visibility at ground level to an undetermined altitude was almost zero because of fog. Rains had fallen periodically throughout the night. The heron was stiff from rigor mortis and the exact cause of death was not determined, but it appeared the bird had either crashed into the road or landed on the road and was hit by a vehicle. The heron was not on the highway at 2200 hours the previous night when I traveled the road.

The Uinta Mountains form the only major east-west mountain range in the United States, extending approximately 131 miles. No Great Blue Herons were observed above 7000 feet in the Uinta Mountains during my two-year mule deer study or during a two-year study of waterfowl use of high mountain lakes conducted by Steven Peterson.

Numerous accounts of migrating birds colliding with man-made structures, including tall lighted buildings and radio and television towers, have been reported. Forty-six species of birds were picked up on the night of 19-20 September 1963 at the television towers at Eau Claire, Wisconsin. David W. Johnston, at the University of Florida, Gainesville, estimated that 50,000 birds died on the nights of 7 and 8 October 1954 at the ceilometer of the Warner Robins Air Force Base near Macon, Georgia. In all instances these mass collisions were associated with rain, fog, and very low cloud ceilings (John Vosburgh, 1966. *Birds in Our Lives*, Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office, p. 361-364).

This observation raises the questions: Do Great Blue Herons migrate over the Uinta Mountain range? During migrations over mountain ranges, under certain climatic conditions is there a mortality resulting from collisions with natural objects and of what magnitude?

¹Utah Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. Now at Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service, 1031 Miracle Mile, Vero Beach, Florida 32960.